



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.®

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CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 17, 2014 Public Hearing

Election Bills

Comments Submitted by Christine S. Horrigan, Government Chair

Opposition To:

Senate Bill No. 441

**AAC ELECTRONIC OR MANUAL CHECK-IN OF VOTERS, THE PROCESS OF
VOTING AND ELECTRONIC FILING OF OFFICIAL CHECKLISTS**

Senate Joint Resolution No. 24

**RESOLUTION PROPOSING A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO PERMIT
OVERSEAS MILITARY VOTERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WAIVE THE RIGHT OF
SECRET VOTING IN ORDER TO VOTE BY ANY METHOD PERMITTED UNDER
STATE LAW**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a statewide organization with over 1600 members committed to effective public policy and the active involvement of citizens in their government. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on SB 441 and SJ 24 before you today.

Senate Bill No. 441

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that the political process must be open to all citizens and that the right to vote with confidence in the election process must be guaranteed for all. To achieve these goals, we support adoption of procedures to minimize voter inconvenience, identification of voters at polls to prevent fraud, implementation of voting systems that are secure, accurate, recountable, accessible and transparent (SARAT), and use of voting systems and procedures that provide fairness to all voters.

While conceptually the League supports the use of electronic check-in systems that meet our SARAT criteria, we oppose this bill, which would allow an "official checker to check the list manually on paper or electronically," for several reasons:

- The bill contains no standards for checking the list electronically. League believes that electronic poll books should meet hardware and software certification standards, determined by the Secretary of the State in consultation with the appropriate experts, before electronic check-in is permitted.

- The bill would allow different towns to purchase different types of equipment, creating a lack of consistency and fairness across towns while also raising the specter of election night chaos.
- The bill also fails to address important issues such as communication between poll books and the statewide voter registration system, measures for keeping voting data secure and accurate, retention and storage of data, and chain of custody procedures.
- The bill does not address the financial and training investment necessary to move to a system of electronic check-in.
- The first section of the bill removes the reference to “assistants” and suggests that the registrars may appoint the official checker to discharge the duties of the registrar of voters in the polling place. Assistant registrars and checkers have very different responsibilities. Among their other duties, official checkers must keep the check-in line moving. When issues requiring investigation – and time - arise during check-in process, those questions are referred to the assistant registrars and/or moderator. Assigning the duties of official checker and assistant registrar to a single individual is an invitation to long poll lines and election night chaos.
- Replacement of the word “checkers” with “checker” throughout the bill implies that one official checker in any polling place is sufficient. We question whether this appropriate, notwithstanding the wonders of technology.

Simply put, the League believes that this bill puts the cart before the horse, does not contain the necessary safeguards to protect our election process, and makes personnel changes that will hinder, rather than help, voters. We urge you to vote NO on SB 441.

Senate Joint Resolution No. 24

Most Americans would agree that the right of secret voting is fundamental to our democracy. The League opposes SJ 24 which would alter our state constitution to allow military voters to waive this right. We believe that including this exception *in the state constitution* may create a slippery slope and have unintended consequences. Under our current election laws, electors can and do waive their right to a secret ballot when they request assistance from family members, caregivers, election officials and others or display their ballots in front of poll workers. Including an exception in the state constitution for overseas military voters suggests that other electors may not waive their right to vote in secret. It also begs the question, why not others?

The legislature has spent a great deal of time and effort attempting to eliminate the list of circumstances under which an elector may vote by absentee ballot from the state constitution. We fear that including an exception for overseas military voters in the state constitution will create an ambiguity with respect to other voters and open the door to more exceptions, each requiring an elaborate and time-consuming effort at amendment. The League believes that there are other ways to deal with the issue of timely voting by military personnel stationed overseas that do not require a constitutional amendment or waiver of the right to a secret ballot. Please vote NO on SJ 24.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on these matters.